



INSPECTOR GENERAL

U.S. Department of Defense

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on

**Department of Defense Office of Inspector
General Report of Investigation on
Allegations Related to USCENTCOM
Intelligence Products**

**Testifying before the
House Armed Services Committee
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
February 28, 2017**

Good afternoon Madam Chairwoman Hartzler, Ranking Member Moulton, and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss the investigation by the Department of Defense Office of Inspector General (DoD OIG) into allegations that senior officials at U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) falsified, distorted, delayed, or suppressed intelligence products related to its efforts to degrade and destroy the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)¹. The allegations, in essence, were that the intelligence was altered or suppressed to present a more optimistic portrayal of the success of USCENTCOM's efforts against ISIL.

These were very serious and troubling allegations, and we devoted significant resources to investigating them. We assembled a multi-disciplinary team of more than 30 DoD OIG employees, including administrative investigators, intelligence analysts, Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS) digital forensics specialists, auditors, attorneys, and statisticians to investigate these allegations. This was one of the most extensive investigations in the DoD OIG's history.

Our team conducted over 150 interviews of 120 witnesses, both inside and outside of USCENTCOM. In addition, we collected and reviewed a massive amount of draft and final intelligence products produced by USCENTCOM's Intelligence Directorate (the CCJ2). We also collected and reviewed USCENTCOM emails, and we examined in detail the specific examples of alleged falsification, distortion, suppression, or delay raised by the complainants and witnesses.

We also interviewed intelligence officials in the DoD and the Intelligence Community for their assessments of USCENTCOM's intelligence products.

We did not stop there. We conducted a systematic analysis regarding the direction of edits that were made within the CCJ2 on counter-ISIL intelligence products. In this analysis, we reviewed a statistically random sample of CCJ2 products, examining each individual edit between the initial and final versions of these products. We sought to determine systematically whether there were any trends in the direction of those edits that made ISIL look less successful and the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) more successful, as raised in the allegations.

We also interviewed witnesses about the command climate in CCJ2, and we reviewed command climate surveys.

Finally, we examined in detail the management processes for producing intelligence products in the CCJ2 to determine if there were deficiencies or weaknesses in need of improvement.

Our full findings and conclusions are contained in a 542-page report of investigation classified at the SECRET level. We have provided that classified report to the relevant organizations in the DoD, as well as this committee and other congressional committees with

¹ The term "ISIL" is used in this statement as well as the DoD OIG report which was issued prior to the Feb. 13, 2017 Memorandum from Secretary of Defense Mattis directing the use of the term ISIS instead of ISIL.

jurisdiction over the DoD or the Intelligence Community. In addition, we prepared a 190-page unclassified report of investigation, which we publicly released on February 1, 2017.

In short, our investigation did not substantiate the most serious allegation that intelligence was falsified. Similarly, we did not find systematic or intentional distortion of intelligence by USCENTCOM senior leaders, or that the leaders suppressed or delayed intelligence products.

However, we did find a troubling and widespread perception among many intelligence analysts who worked on USCENTCOM Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) intelligence products that CCJ2 leaders were attempting to distort those intelligence products.

We also identified specific weaknesses and flaws in the CCJ2 management processes for creating intelligence products. We believe these deficiencies in the processes, such as ineffective communication and guidance, lack of adequate feedback, ambiguity and uncertainty about certain CCJ2 policies, and the ambiguous status of Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) analysts assigned to USCENTCOM, hindered the effectiveness and efficiency of the CCJ2 and affected the morale of the analytic workforce.

We concluded that the intelligence practices related to OIR intelligence products in the CCJ2 could have, and should have, been better, and that further improvements can be made. We therefore made 28 recommendations for improvements in the intelligence processes that relate to the issues we investigated, which we believe will help address the issues that led to the allegations. We made one additional recommendation that senior leaders in the DoD review this report with regard to the overall performance of the individuals described in this report.

In the following sections of this statement, I will summarize in more detail the methodology of our investigation and our findings.

I. Summary of the allegations and the methodology of the investigation

The DoD OIG initiated this investigation to address complaints that senior intelligence officials -- Major General (MG) Steven Grove, U.S. Army, Director of Intelligence (the J2), USCENTCOM; Mr. Gregory Ryckman, Senior Executive Service, Vice Director of Intelligence, USCENTCOM; and Mr. William E. "Buddy" Rizzio, Defense Intelligence Senior Leader, Joint Intelligence Center, USCENTCOM (JICCENT) -- allegedly falsified, distorted, suppressed, or delayed USCENTCOM intelligence products.

Two complainants, whom we call Complainant 1 and Complainant 2 in our report, originally raised the allegations. In addition to their original allegations, we also considered other allegations and issues they and others raised during the course of our investigation. In general, the allegations related to USCENTCOM intelligence products and processes associated with the counter-ISIL campaign, from May 2014, when Mr. Ryckman arrived at USCENTCOM (MG Grove arrived shortly thereafter in June 2014), to the initiation of our investigation in September 2015.

Specifically, the first complainant alleged in a letter dated May 28, 2015, to the DIA Inspector General, that CCJ2 senior intelligence leaders imposed a "false narrative" on analysts and analytic leaders that Iraqi forces, with U.S. help, were performing well on the battlefield, while ISIL was struggling. The complainant asserted that the senior leaders imposed this

narrative through many changes, small and large, on a daily basis, the cumulative effect of which was creation of a false narrative. The complainant also alleged that the JICCEN, which is part of the CCJ2, was eventually reorganized to create a layer of managers willing to enforce the false narrative, “relieving senior leaders of the entire workload of falsifying intelligence, and more broadly socializing the unethical behavior.”

The second complainant also alleged that the top two CCJ2 senior intelligence officials – MG Grove and Mr. Ryckman – routinely and intentionally re-wrote and suppressed intelligence products to conform with a “preconceived narrative,” intentionally withheld information from the DIA, and engaged in “foot-dragging and delay tactics during coordination of DIA HQ’s [Headquarters] intelligence products” in an effort to “undermine DIA’s intelligence production.”

We interviewed the two complainants several times to clarify their allegations, to request documents and examples in support of the allegations, and to ask them for the names of others who they believed had direct knowledge of the facts relating to their allegations. As a result of those interviews and our review of what was provided, in September 2015 we initiated a full-scale investigation of these allegations.

At the outset of our investigation, we invited the Intelligence Community Inspector General (ICIG) to participate in our investigation, but that office declined. However, our investigative team met with ICIG officials, who reviewed and concurred with our methodology and investigative plan.

To investigate the allegations raised by the complainants, as well as those raised by others, we took various steps, including;

- interviewing 120 witnesses (some several times) regarding the allegations;
- seeking documents and examples from the witnesses regarding the allegations;
- conducting detailed reviews of the specific examples that the witnesses raised;
- obtaining, on our own, USCENCOM intelligence products relating to the allegations that were produced during the period covered by our investigation;
- interviewing witnesses outside of USCENCOM regarding their assessment of the intelligence products;
- conducting an analytical review of a statistical, random sample of intelligence products to determine whether the edits made presented a rosier picture of USCENCOM’s operations;
- reviewing the command climate in CCJ2, to include reviewing surveys conducted of CCJ2 analysts; and
- assessing the CCJ2 management processes related to the production and editing of intelligence products and whether there were deficiencies in the processes or areas that could be improved.

In total, we collected over 15 terabytes of unclassified, secret, and top secret data from CCJ2, which represented over 17 million documents and files, approximately 2 million of which were emails. We used search terms and phrases to search the data and emails for evidence relevant to the allegations, and we identified more than 425,000 documents and files for initial review. We reviewed all of those 425,000 documents and files, and we identified thousands of emails and documents for closer scrutiny and evaluation related to the allegations.

We incorporated relevant documents, emails, and evidence specific to each allegation throughout our report.

We also examined in detail the specific examples of alleged falsification, distortion, suppression, or delay that were raised by the complainants and witnesses. Specific examples of the allegations raised by the complainants and witnesses, and which we discuss in the report, include the alleged banning of certain words in intelligence products, the changing of an intelligence product relating to the attack at the Al Asad Air Base in Iraq, a change to the Watch Condition (WATCHCON) level for Iraq during May and June of 2014, changes in the ISIL Assessment Tool and the J2 Weekly update, and changes in the policy on coordination and collaboration with analysts from throughout the Intelligence Community. In addition, other allegations arose during the course of our investigation, which we investigated, such as whether USCENTCOM emails were deleted; whether CCJ2 employees or managers were urged to leave; whether the Director of National Intelligence, James R. Clapper, attempted to influence USCENTCOM intelligence products; and whether anyone in the CCJ2 attempted to intimidate witnesses in this investigation.

In total, we investigated more than 25 specific allegations. Each required an investigation in and of itself. We discuss each of those examples in separate sections of the report.

In addition, we interviewed other officials in the DoD and the Intelligence Community regarding their views on USCENTCOM's intelligence products related to the counter-ISIL campaign. We believe an important factor to consider was whether other intelligence officials outside USCENTCOM, who often had access to similar information that formed the basis for CCJ2 intelligence products, believed those CCJ2 intelligence products were distorted. While those officials did not conduct a systemic comparison of the intelligence products, their perspective provides insight on whether USCENTCOM's intelligence products were markedly different in tone or outlook from other intelligence products their organizations produced on similar subjects. We therefore sought the view of those officials, who worked in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), the DIA, the Joint Staff, and elsewhere.

As noted above, we also conducted an analytical review of a random sample of USCENTCOM intelligence products. The overall purpose of this review was to determine whether there were any significant changes related to edits of these products, and whether such changes indicated any trend or pattern of distortion with regard to the portrayal of ISIL and the ISF as stronger or weaker, as alleged by the complainants and some witnesses. To conduct this review, we examined a stratified random sample of 140 USCENTCOM final intelligence products related to the counter-ISIL efforts that the CCJ2 produced from May 1, 2014, through September 30, 2015.

II. Findings of the investigation

In sum, we did not substantiate the most serious allegation, which was that intelligence was falsified. Only a few witnesses described intelligence assessments as false, and they did not provide specific examples that supported the allegation. They did not point out, and we did not find, specific intelligence products that contained false – untrue – facts or analysis. We also did not find sufficient evidence to conclude that the CCJ2 or its leaders attempted to change

intelligence to make it factually untrue. Nor did we find that the senior leaders presented, or allowed to be presented, any intelligence assessments that they did not believe were accurate.

The more difficult matter to investigate was the allegation that CCJ2 intelligence was distorted – or skewed – to portray counter-ISIL operations in a rosier light, or to show that ISF was stronger and ISIL weaker than the intelligence warranted. We found much greater difference of testimony on this allegation. In our investigation we found a strong perception among many intelligence analysts who worked on USCENTCOM OIR intelligence products that CCJ2 leaders were attempting to distort the intelligence products, either through excessive editing, imposition of a narrative, requiring a higher burden of proof for “bad news,” or demanding additional sourcing requirements if the intelligence indicated that ISIL was doing well or ISF was struggling.

However, when we analyzed the full scope of the testimony, both by USCENTCOM analysts and leaders, and by other intelligence officials outside USCENTCOM; reviewed the specific examples provided by the complainants and the witnesses regarding alleged distortion; searched over 17 million documents and files, including approximately 2 million emails for evidence of distortion; and conducted our own analytic assessment of a sample of intelligence products, we did not substantiate that CCJ2 leaders intended to distort intelligence products or that their changes to intelligence products resulted in a false narrative or systematic distortion of intelligence. Similarly, we did not find sufficient evidence to substantiate the allegations that CCJ2 leadership suppressed intelligence, or that they attempted to delay intelligence products for improper purposes.

With regard to the specific examples of distortion to which the complainants and other witnesses pointed, we did not find that they demonstrated any systematic or intentional distortion of intelligence.

For example, some witnesses stated that the editing process included the “banning of many words” that accurately described the intelligence. They alleged that certain terminology was used in order to convey a more positive narrative regarding the progress of the counter-ISIL campaign. Some witnesses told us that certain words would consistently be changed during the editing process to words that they believed “softened the tone” of poor performance by the ISF.

However, other witnesses told us that words were not changed to soften the tone of poor performance by the ISF. They said that the CCJ2 senior intelligence leaders wanted to use terminology consistent with military doctrine to characterize the ISF’s actions, that they wanted to avoid emotional language in intelligence products, and that they wanted to use terminology that the commander and operators understood. We found no written list of banned words. We also found that some of the allegedly banned words were included in final intelligence products.

As another example of alleged distortion, one of the complainants pointed to the CCJ2 leadership’s decision not to change the WATCHCON level (a numerical system that categorizes intelligence concerns) in May 2014, as several analysts recommended, and that Mosul fell in June 2014 before the WATCHCON was eventually changed, after MG Grove’s arrival. We do not believe that this provides evidence of an intent to distort intelligence or present a rosier intelligence picture. The decision not to change the WATCHCON, but to continue to assess the environment, was a reasonable, good-faith decision by CCJ2 leadership at the time, and does not

indicate any intent to present a rosier picture of the fight against ISIL. However, the CCJ2 leadership's decision not to raise the WATCHCON level when analysts recommended it be changed, but instead to raise it after the fall of Mosul, contributed to the early perception that the leadership did not trust the analysts and wanted to control the "narrative."

Similarly, the allegation raised in the complaints that changes to the format of intelligence products were implemented to ensure that a narrative was imposed on the analysts also was not supported. When we interviewed the CCJ2 leaders, and others, about their reasons for the changes – such as the reason to reduce the size of the Intelligence Summary (INTSUM) and turn it into a more summarized, executive-level product – the decision seemed to be a reasonable management decision. However, while the change appeared to be reasonable, CCJ2 leadership provided inadequate explanation and communication to the workforce about the rationale for the change, which contributed to the perception that the changes were being imposed to enforce a narrative that ISIL was weak and the ISF was strong.

In addition, MG Grove changed how coordination and collaboration among analysts occurred, but we found that the change was not explained clearly. There is a distinction between collaboration (discussions among analysts on evidence and analysis), which was still permitted, and coordination (USCENTCOM's official concurrence to another organization's intelligence product), which was restricted. In our view, it was not unreasonable for CCJ2 leadership to want to ensure that the official USCENTCOM position on intelligence products was reviewed by leadership. On the other hand, it would have been unreasonable and counter to effective intelligence practices to restrict collaboration between analysts. After our interviews, we found that CCJ2 leadership did not intend to restrict collaboration. However, CCJ2 leaders at various levels did not clearly articulate this policy change, either orally or in writing, which resulted in widespread confusion about whether collaboration was still permitted.

We also did not find evidence that the JICCENT reorganizations were designed for any improper purpose. Rather, they were legitimate management decisions to address the crisis production and to improve the quality of the intelligence products. The changes did impose more oversight, review, and editing of CCJ2 intelligence products, which many analysts did not like. This was a change for the analysts, whose work in the past underwent less scrutiny and editing. Some witnesses told us that the editing and scrutiny was necessary and productive. Others thought it was unnecessary and did not improve the products. However, these changes appeared to be justifiable management actions, intended to improve products in a crisis environment. Once again, the rationale for these changes was not adequately communicated to the workforce.

We discuss in detail in our classified report the results of our investigation of these and other allegations of falsification, distortion, or suppression.

As noted above, we also conducted an analytical assessment of a random sample of USCENTCOM intelligence products. This assessment provided mixed results. For the individual edits, we did not find a statistically significant difference across the entire time period for ISIL and ISF individual tone changes. However, in one time period, from October 2014 to January 2015, the raw numbers in the sample product review show a greater number of ISIL-weaker tone changes and fewer number of ISIL-stronger tone changes. We believe the greater

number of ISIL-weaker tone changes may have contributed to some analysts' perception of distortion.

With respect to the testimony of other intelligence officials regarding the USCENTCOM products, the testimony of those officials was also mixed. Some saw USCENTCOM's products as consistent with those from the Intelligence Community. Others thought that USCENTCOM's intelligence products were somewhat more optimistic than their products. None thought that USCENTCOM's products were inaccurate or unreasonable. Also, none of these witnesses asserted that they perceived a deliberate or systematic attempt by USCENTCOM to distort intelligence.

Yet, while we did not find evidence to support a finding of systematic or intentional distortion of intelligence, we found it very troubling that so many USCENTCOM analysts believed their leaders distorted intelligence or imposed a narrative on their intelligence products. Almost half of the intelligence analysts that we interviewed in the JICCENT and who provided an opinion on this question believed that intelligence was being skewed in some way, either by imposing a narrative, requiring a higher burden of proof if the intelligence provided bad news, or requiring additional sourcing. These numbers were also consistent with the survey that the ODNI conducted in 2015. We believe that the widespread perception alone indicated a significant problem, which we found the CCJ2 leaders failed to adequately address in a timely way.

Our investigation identified multiple causes for this widespread perception of distortion and the lack of trust in the CCJ2 leadership among analysts who worked on OIR products. First, the operational tempo of intelligence production was high, and stressful, even before MG Grove and Mr. Ryckman assumed their leadership positions in 2014. The pace was fast, the workload was unrelenting, and the diversity of important intelligence matters within USCENTCOM's area of responsibility was vast. As a result, workforce morale was low when MG Grove and Mr. Ryckman arrived. Soon thereafter, the pace increased as the crisis production began with the onset of the counter-ISIL campaign (OIR), and intelligence products were modified to create more tactically oriented products on an around-the-clock basis.

Also contributing to the tension was the atypical requirement for the CCJ2 to report not simply on ISIL's operations, but also on the operations of friendly forces – the ISF. The CCJ2's responsibility for reporting on the ISF often required the CCJ2 to make assessments that related to the success of the USCENTCOM commanders and troops who were training, advising, and assisting the ISF in the counter-ISIL campaign. Resolving the intelligence inputs and the inputs of operators on the ground was sensitive and at times led to friction with the operational commanders. This created a difficult dynamic when the operations side of USCENTCOM had divergent views from the intelligence analysts regarding what was happening on the ground.

In addition, we found that MG Grove and Mr. Ryckman's management style differed significantly from prior CCJ2 senior intelligence leaders. MG Grove and Mr. Ryckman were much more involved in the product approval process, which was their prerogative. They often believed that the products were not well written, fully explained, adequately supported, or inclusive of all inputs, including the operators' perspectives. Their scrutiny created further distrust and friction with the analytic workforce and likely contributed to the perception of an imposed narrative.

Coupled with these changes and differing requirements, we found a notable lack of communication from CCJ2 leaders at multiple levels explaining the changes, providing guidance on what they sought, giving feedback on the edits they were making, or communicating their expectations to the analytic workforce. We believe this failure was a significant cause of the analysts' belief in distortion, and a significant reason that allegations were made.

Overall, we were struck by the inadequate efforts, especially during the first 6 months of the counter-ISIL campaign, and continuing until the allegations of distortion became public and the initiation of this investigation, by CCJ2 senior leaders to communicate with the workforce and to address the serious concerns among intelligence analysts about distortion of their products.

As reflected in surveys and witnesses' testimony, the command climate deteriorated after MG Grove and Mr. Ryckman first arrived at the CCJ2. However, it is important to note that it has improved since the lowest point in 2014. MG Grove and Mr. Ryckman eventually took some positive steps to address command climate issues within the CCJ2, which resulted in improvements in the 2015 and 2016 survey results. Yet, we believe that additional improvements can be made in the CCJ2, and we provide specific recommendations regarding such steps.

III. Recommendations resulting from investigation

During our investigation, we identified various weaknesses and flaws in the process that we believe contributed to the allegations, as well as the widespread perception that CCJ2 senior intelligence leaders were distorting intelligence to present a more positive view of the success of the ISF and a more negative view of the success of ISIL. We also believe these management deficiencies hindered the effectiveness and efficiency of the CCJ2 and JICCEN, as well as the morale of the analytic workforce.

Our review concluded that more effective communication and feedback throughout the organization, improved written policies and guidance, and better application of analytical tradecraft, such as Intelligence Community Directive (ICD) 203's standard of incorporating analysis of alternatives, could have mitigated some of the conflict and concern about CCJ2 and JICCEN intelligence products and analysis, as well as improved the intelligence production process. In our report, we discuss 29 recommendations in the following sections:

1. Communication and Feedback,
2. Organizational Change and Priorities,
3. Inconsistency and Ambiguity in the Production and Analytical Review Process,
4. Friendly Force Assessment, and
5. Balance of the Intelligence Effort.

Some of the most important recommendations include that:

- USCENCOM improve feedback, communication, and guidance between CCJ2 leaders and their workforce (Recommendations #1 and #2);

- USCENTCOM update and maintain its JICCEN standard operating procedures, including the employment of the Intelligence Fusion Center (Recommendation #5);
- The relationship, reporting responsibilities, and intelligence requirements that apply to DIA analysts detailed to combatant commands should be clarified, in writing, so that DIA employees and their supervisors clearly understand their roles and responsibilities (Recommendation #11);
- CCJ2 and JICCEN leaders should provide clearer guidance and feedback to the analysts on how intelligence products are reviewed and considered above the JICCEN level. JICCEN should incorporate additional training to address any trends or systemic deficiencies identified in intelligence products (Recommendation #16);
- USD(I) supervise DIA's training and certification of DIA analysts assigned to USCENTCOM (Recommendation #17);
- USCENTCOM intelligence leaders should avoid stating or implying any blanket policy that eliminates or reduces sources of intelligence, especially in crisis situations where there may be poor clarity and limited sources. (Recommendation #22);
- CCJ2 leaders should require that intelligence analysis include analysis of alternatives. Consider requiring multiple courses of action, when feasible, to encourage comparison and evaluation of reports (Recommendation # 26).

We also recommend that senior leaders in the responsible organization review this report with regard to the overall performance of the individuals described in this report.

We believe that all 29 recommendations are important, and that they provide a useful roadmap for improving intelligence processes, not only in USCENTCOM, but throughout other Combatant Commands and the DoD. We also note that many of our recommendations are consistent with what the U.S. House of Representatives Task Force found.

We therefore urge the DoD, DIA, and USCENTCOM to take these recommendations seriously and to fully implement corrective action in response to the recommendations, or to explain in detail why such corrective action is not necessary or warranted. We believe that such actions can further improve intelligence processes and reduce the risk that allegations such as the ones at issue in this report will arise in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our investigation with the Subcommittee. This concludes my statement and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.